

Professor Lazevnick

ART 305 Art of the 19th Century

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Visual Analysis Paper

Medée 1898 by Alphonse Mucha

The first thing to grab the reader is the eyes. The figure's piercing green eyes, accentuated by the dark blue hues surround them giving a haunting look as you follow the subject's arm downward to the dagger stained with blood that she clutches in her hand. The subject is cloaked in black and stands before her misdeed as it lays lifeless at her feet. This is a poster by the late 19th-century artist Alphonse Mucha during the Art Nouveau movement titled *Medee: Theatre de la Renaissance* from 1898.

Starting with the background, a key feature seen is a mosaic tile-like pattern that lays out the name of the play, *Medee*. It is enclosed in a box nested on the top of five frames found in the piece. On either side of the title are floral ornaments, they act as anchors to the otherwise plain texts to further ground the titles in their importance as far as typography goes. Moving downward, behind the subject is an abstract background, a sort of hazy red morning sun. These rather simple shapes suggesting a landscape seem to have the same purpose as the five frames we see in the piece; to make the focus be solely on the figure standing.

The circle acts as more frames, a frame within a frame more so, with the figure standing off-center, throwing off the balance and making the viewers' eyes drawn towards the

abnormality. The hazy clouds point inward towards the central figure and the tree or bush helps take up that negative space beside the subject.

The figure is seen standing is dressed in various shades of black, the only color showing in the reds and yellows of her hair. Her arms lay bare by her side, not bothering to hide the dagger in her hand that is stained with blood. Her hands lay cross, one holding the blood-soaked dagger and the other, adorned with a serpent, clutching the other hand. There is a taut tension in her hands as if she is trying her best to hold in her violent nature. The serpent bracelet wrapped around her left arms reaches from her elbow down to her knuckles, perhaps a nod to the serpent that tempted Eve in the garden. Her other hand holding the knife is much more interesting. It limply holds the dagger, like at any moment it may fall out. Having held a knife or dagger of that size in real life, it is not that light, and the artists does well to show the strain of the weight.

The flowing black fabric acts like it's melting and boiling at the figure's feet, leading the viewer to look upon the limp body that lies lifeless and draped across her feet. Draped across her shoulder is a shawl or just more fabric that is partly coving her face to force the viewer to look into the standing figure's eyes. Perhaps the most centric part of the piece is the subject's face. The first aspect that catches the viewer's attention is the subject's striking green eyes that are widening in shock. Her eyes show the emotion of shock or revelation, widening itself wider than was seems naturalistic. The darkness surrounding her eyes seems to further its wideness and give the subject a sort of sunken face. An almost bewitching beauty to the subject.

Her cool tone skinned, outmatched by the blue tone of the body lying by her feet, is in stark contrast to the subject's flaming blond and orange hair. The hair is adorned with florals, I want to say irises or lily flowers. Typically, a flower one gives at funerals, the floral arrangement adds to the deathly tone of the piece that despite its beauty lies a darkness underneath. Mucha

also seems to choose to give the subject a seven-point crown that lies behind the subject's head, shooting out rays. However, its dark tones lean into it becoming a point of direction to bring the view back to the figure's facial expression.

The overall tone is a dark and intriguing notion. One that when a first-time viewer sets their eyes upon it they want to know more about the tragedy that took place. The choice to make the subject look directly at its audience creates a power struggle between the subject and viewer, a standoff over who will look away first. Another power struggle seen is the push and pull between the cool and warm tones. Traditionally, the further away from a subject, the cooler in color tone it gets and the closer the warmer it gets. However, here, the most upfront and center subjects are draped in mainly cool tones, saving the warm tone only for the main subject's hair and background. The frame within a frame also creates complexity to a rather simple composition, luring the viewer to figure out what events led up to the death. The floral patterns, very subtle in this particular piece are a nod to Slavic and Polish traditions patterns repurposed in a more modern usage. This reads almost as a hint of pride in the artist's nationalism and a love letter to his culture to be shared with the world

With the theme of power struggle being centric to the piece as seen in the off-center of the subject, the heavy knife held with only two fingers, and the standoff stare, the poster uses all of this to make the viewer stop to read what is happening as this is first and foremost a theater poster. The simple composition hides complexity in patterns and hidden symbolism. This dark piece of theater poster stands to call out its audience and creates a dialogue between the viewer and subject.